

Service quality and the training of employees: The mediating role of organizational commitment



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HIGHLIGHTS

- Study findings revealed strong relationships between training and service quality.
- Commitment was found to be acting as a mediator between training and service quality.
- SME tourist hotels need to be trained to improve their performance.

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the attitudes of employees working in Indian hotels catering to tourists. It analyzed their perception of training opportunities and the impact of such training on the service provided to guests. An integrated model was developed highlighting the relationship between perceived accessibility to training, perceived support for training, perceived benefits from training, and the implications of training on service quality mediated through organizational commitment. Using a sample of 494 employees, structural equation modeling was conducted to establish this relationship by analyzing the responses of employees working in small and medium size tourist hotels operating in Uttarakhand, India. The findings of the study reveal a strong relationship between employee training and the quality of services offered by employees in tourist hotels. The study discusses the implications of the presented findings and suggests potential practical applications.

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1. Introduction

In today's world, tourism is widely recognized by various business houses, international funding agencies, as well as various governments as an effective way to raise the development of the economy of a country; so much so that emerging economies like India have begun to consider it an alternative source of economic growth (Oppermann & Chon, 1997; Sindiga, 1999). This is mainly due to the potential benefits seen by governments in terms of generating employment opportunities, infrastructure development, and the financial benefits of foreign exchange (Goswami & Saikia, 2012; Lee & Brahmasrene, 2013; Temiz & Gökmen, 2014).

The Indian hotel industry has shown a steady growth of approximately 14% during the last few years and experts predict a similar growth trend in the coming years (Vardharajan & Rajan, 2013). This has resulted in the development of a large number of

hotels, specifically in India's tourist areas, leading to fierce competition among developers (Gautam, 2012). The present market size of Indian tourism and the hospitality industry is around \$120 billion and is expected to pass \$420 billion by 2025 (IBEF, 2013).

An outcome of this growth can be seen in the measures taken by the management of tourist hotels who not only work to retain old customers but also to attract new ones by adopting different measures (Karatepe & Douri, 2012; Kim, Cha, Singh, & Knutson, 2013). The consistent rise in travel expenditures accompanied by changes in tourist requirements (Kaur, 1985) have encouraged tour and hospitality operators in India to develop a range of package deals for their customers. Small and medium sized hotels, in this regard, have grown at a consistent rate of 6–7% since 2013 (ONICRA, 2013), which has created huge employment opportunities. They have also performed the important role of enhancing the growth and development of the Indian economy by providing 40% of total exports and 45% of industrial output (Goyal, 2013). Hence, the focus of this study is on small and medium sized tourist hotels operating in Uttarakhand, India.

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The state of Uttarakhand, India is considered one of the important centers of pilgrim activities and is visited by millions of national and international pilgrims, due to the presence of four major Hindu shrines – Yamunotri, Gangotri, Badrinath and Kedarnath (Kala, 2004; Kala & Maikhuri, 2011). In order to meet the requirements of a huge influx of pilgrims, a complex network of roadways, hotels, restaurants, lodges, and other related systems has been developed in the last two decades. Apart from religious sites, various wildlife parks, mountain vistas, hill stations, and trekking routes have also become a major source of attraction for national and international tourists and, in 2013, Uttarakhand was voted “the best emerging destination” in South Asia (IBEF, 2013). However, while the tourism industry in general has seen an increase in financial performance, specifics of employee behavior in tourist hotels have been taken for granted. Researchers have indicated that the quality of service offered by employees has a direct impact on a customer's decision to re-visit a hotel. Although studies of tourist hotels have been conducted since the 1980s (Barrington & Olsen, 1987), only in the last decade has service quality gained the attention of practitioners, academicians, and researchers (Lassar, Manolis, & Winsor, 2000). In the absence of appropriate training for hotel employees, meeting the high expectations of customers has remained a challenge for hotels and an area of concern for the industry (Clark, Hartline, & Jones, 2009).

It is largely agreed that employee training plays a significant role in improving employee performance in terms of offering better quality services and, hence, helping an organization obtain a competitive advantage. According to Buckley and Caple (1995), training can be defined as “a planned and systematic effort to modify or develop knowledge, skill, and attitude through learning experience, to achieve effective performance in an activity or range of activities” (p. 34). In this regard, training in desired skills and knowledge can be considered an investment in the most important resource of the organization, i.e., ‘human resources’. From this perspective, training can also be considered a way to improve employees' satisfaction level concerning their personal and professional development. Further, researchers like Scott and Meyer (1991) have suggested that investment in employee training contributes significantly toward raising the productivity and performance of an organization. In spite of this, there are comparatively few studies available supporting the argument that HRD positively influences organizational performance (Torraco, 1999). Researchers have suggested that consistent efforts need to be made to ensure effective and adequate training is provided to employees so they can achieve organizational goals with a higher degree of confidence. This is possible when employees display a higher level of commitment toward their organization (e.g. see Bulut & Culha, 2010; Ehrhardt, Miller, Freeman, & Hom, 2011).

Although numerous studies have been carried out to establish the relationship between training and its impact on the commitment level of employees in countries like Malaysia (Teck-Hong & Yong-Kean, 2012), Turkey (Bulut & Culha, 2010), Qatar (Al Emadi & Marquardt, 2007), few studies of a similar nature have been done in the Indian context. In some western countries, studies have been conducted providing evidence that training has a positive impact on the commitment level of employees. Internationally, studies carried out by various researchers like Glaveli and Karassavidou (2011) and Shantz and Latham (2012) have highlighted the positive effect of training on various work related outcomes for improving organizational performance. However, until now, studies on training in India have largely focused on the returns of training programs and organizational policies (Chidambaram, Ramachandran, & Thevar, 2013; Subramanian, Sinha, & Gupta, 2012; Yadapadithaya & Stewart, 2003). Very few studies have examined the impact of training on employee commitment levels

and, subsequently, their performance related outcomes, such as service quality.

This study examines employee perception of training related activities carried out by an organization, including perceived accessibility to training, perceived support for training, and perceived benefits of training on their commitment level toward their organizations. The subsequent impact on quality of services they provide to customers of small and medium sized tourist hotels in Uttarakhand, India is also considered. A literature review supporting the model is given below.

2. Theoretical foundation and hypothesis formulation

2.1. Organizational commitment

Organizational commitment is considered one of the most important concepts in the area of organizational behavior and human resource management (Cohen, 2007). In spite of the fact that organizational commitment is considered a single construct, Meyer and Allen (1991) divided it into three different aspects: affective, continuance and normative commitment. According to Meyer and Allen (1991), affective commitment is “an employee's emotional attachment to, identification with and involvement in the organization”; continuance commitment is “commitment based on the costs that employees associate with leaving the organization”; and normative commitment is “an employee's feelings of obligation to remain with the organization” (Meyer & Allen, 1991, p. 67).

Employees who have a strong faith in the values and beliefs of an organization and readily accept its goals and objectives and are ready to exert extra effort for or on behalf of the organization are considered to have a very high level of organizational commitment (Angel & Perry, 1981; Porter, Steers, Mowday, & Boulian, 1974). This suggests that those who are strongly affiliated to an organization with a higher level of commitment can be motivated to achieve organizational goals without looking for an opportunity for personal gain.

Studies conducted in the last 10 years have conceptualized organizational commitment as affective organizational commitment, organizational commitment, or affective commitment (Ariani, 2012; Sani, 2013). Such commitment displayed by employees is largely based on their willingness to accept the organization's values and strategies and their strong desire to work for the betterment of the organization and remain with the organization (Porter et al., 1974).

A large number of studies has examined the commitment level of employees toward their organization and its relationship with various employee work related outcomes, such as turnover, performance, and organizational citizenship behavior. Along similar lines, a number of studies has been conducted in India that have revealed that organizational commitment has a direct relationship with trust (Nambudiri, 2012), cultural values (Singh & Mohanty, 2011), participation satisfaction (Kanwar, Singh, & Kodwani, 2012) and a mediating relationship between HR practices and turnover intentions (see Guchait & Cho, 2010). However, no research has been conducted in India to examine the effect of training on the commitment level of employees and its subsequent impact on employee quality of service. Hence, this study examines the mediating role of commitment between training and customer service quality in the context of small and medium sized tourist hotels.

2.1.1. Perceived access to training and organizational commitment

Perceived access to training refers to employees' perception of the opportunities they are given to attend training programs regardless of eligibility, including support from their managers, fair criteria for being selected for a program or, following a formal process, selection for training. The probability of gaining access to a

training program is considered an important factor of the development of a strong corporate culture and has a positive relationship with organizational commitment (e.g. see Bulut & Culha, 2010; Ehrhardt et al., 2011). Past studies have shown that giving employees an opportunity to learn develops a higher level of commitment among employees, compared to job security, monetary benefits, and job satisfaction (McNeese-Smith, 2001). Further, it has been found that employee commitment levels are high when they are given training opportunities and, hence, they display a higher rate of training participation (Bartlett, 2001).

Bartlett and Kang (2004) further revealed that firms who are perceived to have fair accessibility to training programs are more likely to have a greater number of committed employees in their organization. A training program that is effective may also lead to employees forming an opinion that their organization demonstrates a willingness to invest in them, since the organization cares about them. This encourages a higher level of commitment among employees toward their organization (Brunetto, Farr-Wharton, & Shacklock, 2012; Teck-Hong & Yong-Kean, 2012). Past studies in countries like Malaysia and the US have shown that perceived accessibility to training is positively associated with higher affective commitment (Ahmad & Bakar, 2003; Bartlett, 2001). This suggests that organizations may increase the commitment level of employees by simply promoting their training programs and making them accessible to employees. Hence, based on the above literature, the following hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis 1: Access to training is related positively to organizational commitment

2.1.2. Perceived support for training and organizational commitment

Employees who perceive that their organization supports upgrading and skill development in order to find better solutions to work related problems, feel obligated to display a higher level of commitment toward their organization (Brunetto et al., 2012; Teck-Hong & Yong-Kean, 2012). In contrast, when they feel an absence of support from their organization, employees may feel betrayed and display a lower level of commitment toward their organization (Robinson & Morrison, 1995). According to studies conducted by Noe and Wilk (1993), the higher the level of support employees perceive to receive from their organization, the more they feel like participating in such programs. Similarly, Bartlett (2001) found that support for training has a direct relationship with employee affective commitment level. Further, the study conducted by Colquitt, LePine, and Noe (2000) found that support for participation in training programs was influencing the individual behavior of employees toward training, ultimately leading to a higher level of commitment. Based on these findings, it can be concluded that support for participation in training programs increases the perception of accessibility to training programs among employees. This is ultimately related to employees developing a feeling of attachment toward their organization when they perceive a higher level of support for training. Based on this, the next proposed hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis 2: Employees' perceived degree of support for training positively affects their commitment level

2.1.3. Perceived benefits from training and organizational commitment

Training programs conducted by any organization are reciprocal in nature. However, when employees sense that attending a training program benefits the organization and themselves, they show a higher level of interest in participating in the program and,

subsequently, such programs tend to yield better results (Facteau, Dobbins, Russell, Ladd, & Kudisch, 1995). Researchers like Phillips and Stone (2002) have observed that "Most successful training programs result in some intangible benefits. Intangible benefits are those positive results that either cannot be converted to monetary values" (p. 210). Phillips and Phillips (2000), along with Phillips and Stone (2002), found that organizational commitment is an intangible result of training programs conducted for employees.

According to Noe and Wilk (1993), training program benefits can be looked at from three different perspectives: (a) personal benefits, (b) job related benefits, and (c) career benefits. Personal benefits refer to the benefits that an employee attending the training program can expect to achieve in terms of improving their job performance, developing their network, and attaining personal growth and development. Job related benefits lead to the development of better relationships with colleagues and managers and gives a break from the daily work routine. Career benefits can be considered an outcome of employee participation in training programs, as it helps them achieve their career objectives and pursue new paths to extend and develop their careers (Noe & Wilk, 1993).

Employees who believe that by attending a training program they will gain positive results aspire for and are highly motivated to attend (Dubin, 1990; Tharenou, 2001). In this regard, Ahmad and Bakar (2003) suggest that employees who understand the advantages of attending a training program will display a higher level of commitment toward their organization so that they will be allowed to participate in more training activities carried out by the organization. Similar findings have been revealed by other researchers (e.g. see Al Emadi & Marquardt, 2007; Brunetto et al., 2012).

Further, Ahmad and Bakar (2003) have found a strong relationship between the benefits of training programs and affective commitment. The benefits that employees perceive to have gained by attending a training program lead to the enhancement of their commitment level, as they aim to achieve their personal and career related objectives. Hence, the next hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis 3: Employees' perceived degree of benefits from training positively affects their commitment level

2.2. Organizational commitment and its relationship with customer service quality

In the field of marketing, service quality offered to customers is the most widely discussed topic and area of research (Iacobucci, 1998), since it is considered to be highly complex in nature. Customer service quality has a number of dimensions primarily based on a variety of customer service related aspects (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1988; Schembri & Sandberg, 2011).

According to Grönroos (1981), service quality is a part of a customer's desired expectation of service. According to Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1985), it is considered the difference between customer expectations and the kind of service the customer receives; if the latter does not meet the level of satisfaction, it leads to a feeling of discontentment on the part of customers. Employee commitment levels can be evaluated in the manner in which they welcome their customers, attend to their issues, and, hence, support and fulfill the objectives of an organization. Employees who feel part of an organization and agree to the targets stipulated by the management perform their duties and responsibilities with sincerity, unlike employees who stay with the organization just for the sake of duty or merely under obligation (Malhotra, Mavondo, Avinandan, & Hooley, 2013). Studies have shown that customer satisfaction is gained when employees demonstrate a keenness to engage in discretionary efforts. This leads

to customer retention and positive word of mouth publicity (Libai, Muller, & Peres, 2013). It has also been seen that organizations can build long-term relationships with their customers by having a committed workforce (Boshoff & Allen, 2000; Gounaris, 2005). Hence, it can be said that in order to have loyal customers, an organization needs a workforce that is faithful and committed (Evanschitzky, Iyer, Plassmann, Niessing, & Meffert, 2006).

It has been already shown that employees who are committed to an organization and use discretionary efforts are prone to excel in achieving quality customer service (Zeithaml, Parasuraman, & Berry, 1990). In spite of this, comparatively few studies have been carried out to highlight the direct relationship between organizational commitment and customer service quality (Malhotra et al., 2013) in the context of the hospitality industry. Hence, the following hypothesis is proposed based on the above literature:

Hypothesis 4: Organizational commitment has a positive relationship with customer service quality

2.3. Mediating effects of organizational commitment

Conducting mandatory training programs highlights the commitment level of management toward the quality of services it wants to offer its customers. Studies conducted by Tsui, Pearce, Porter, and Tripoli (1997) have also confirmed that an organization which invests more in its employees is more productive compared to organizations that invest less in their employees. Hence, it can be said that training helps to increase employee performance (Yoo & Park, 2007) and competitive ability (Colbert, 2004) in a dramatic way. It further sends the message to employees that the organization is committed to increasing its performance by enhancing the competence of the employees (Elmadag, Ellinger, & Franke, 2008). Such beliefs about the organization encourage employees to go beyond their role boundaries and demonstrate extra role performance.

The relationship between various perceptions of training and its impact on service quality may be mediated by the organizational commitment level displayed by employees. In other words, employees may show a dramatic improvement in the quality of services they offer to customers if they are trained in problem solving and technical skills (Boshoff & Allen, 2000; Yavas & Babakus, 2010). This kind of training not only improves employee competency but also creates a feeling of obligation for them to repay it, which takes the form of displaying a higher level of commitment toward the organization. Employees who feel the organization supports them by offering them relevant training programs, provide faster and better solutions to customer issues (Boshoff & Allen, 2000; Yavas, Karatepe, Avci, & Tekinkus, 2003).

Likert (1967) perceived that accessibility to training programs tends to increase the commitment level of employees, which ultimately results in improved performance in terms of delivering better quality of service. In this regard, Russell, Terborg, and Powers (1985) concluded that perceived accessibility to training programs helps an organization achieve its desired performance, since it influences the commitment level of its workforce.

Many researchers have agreed that the perceived benefits of a training program affect the commitment level of employees, which has an impact on their performance. For example, Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison, and Sowa (1986) stressed that the performance level of employees was found to be very high when they perceived benefits from attending a training program. Further, researchers like Sahinidis and Bouris (2008) revealed that employees who perceived they could benefit from attending a training program displayed a very high level of commitment toward their organization, resulting in high performance delivery in terms of

better service quality. Based on this research, the following hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis 5(a): Organizational commitment mediates the relationship between perceived accessibility to training and service quality

Hypothesis 5(b): Organizational commitment mediates the relationship between perceived support for training and service quality

Hypothesis 5(c): Organizational commitment mediates the relationship between perceived benefits from training and service quality

The model (Fig. 1) as hypothesized is shown below.

3. Research method

3.1. Sample and data collection

Data was taken from customer contact employees and customers of tourist hotels located in Uttarakhand, India. The language of the questionnaire was translated from English to Hindi, and back translated to English, with the help of two bilingual experts to ensure the quality of the questionnaire (Brislin, 1970). The questionnaires were distributed to 53 small and medium sized tourist hotels after conducting a session with each hotel's representative to clarify the survey process for the tourist hotel employees. Accordingly, every hotel representative was asked to distribute the questionnaires to 10 employees and three questionnaires to each employee's first three customers, so that bias in the selection of customers could be avoided. In total, 530 customer contact employees' questionnaires were distributed. The employees were asked to answer questions about their perception of access to training programs, benefits from training, support for training, and their level of commitment. Out of 530 questionnaires, 494 were usable, amounting to a response rate of 93.21%. On the very same day, each employee was asked to distribute customer questionnaires. This totaled 1590 customer questionnaires. The customers' questionnaires were connected to the contact employees'. The customers were asked to return the questionnaires in coded envelopes to make it easy to identify employees' respective customers. Of 1590 questionnaires, 1080 were usable, which amounted to a net response of 67.92%. Then, the customers' responses were averaged and matched with the answers of their respective contact employees, amounting to 494 employee–customer dyads.

As shown in Table 1, the responses revealed a high level of polarization regarding gender distribution (i.e., the majority of responses was received from male employees). This might be due to the fact that gender is regarded as fundamental to the formation of the organizational culture, as has been shown in various hospitality studies (e.g. see Campos-Soria, Marchante-Mera, & Ropero-García, 2011; Ineson, Yap, & Whiting, 2013; Pinar, McCuddy, Birkan, & Kozak, 2011) and organizations effectively form “gender cultures” that are known to be patriarchal, hierarchical, sex segregated, sex discriminatory, and sexually divided to contain gender power structures (Dainty, Neale, & Bagilhole, 2000; Itzin, 1995). In this context, it is not surprising to see that masculinity forms a key aspect of the hospitality organizational culture (Hofstede, 1984). In general, hospitality has been considered a male profession, at least in Indian hospitality SMEs. The image of this profession is that it involves mostly long and anti-social working hours that are more disadvantageous to women than to men (Doherty, 1999; Guerrier, 1986; Kensbock, Jennings, Bailey, & Patiar, 2013). Thus, not only are there fewer women in this industry (Hughes, 1995), but also there is a sharp segregation of roles in terms of gender (Wirth, 2004).

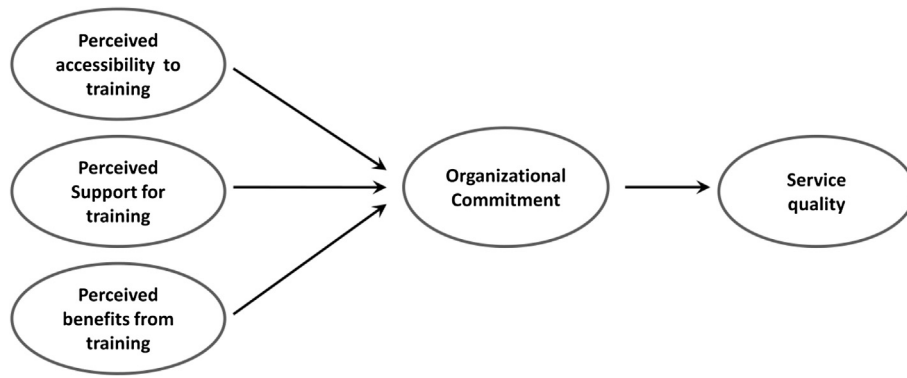


Fig. 1. Hypothesized model.

Furthermore, the education level of employees in small and medium tourist hotels is comparatively high (22.67% post graduates). This is mainly due to the low number of employment opportunities available to the youth in this region, resulting in the youth taking whatever jobs are available. Past studies have already highlighted similar findings (e.g. see Dhar, 2013, 2014) which showed the absence of desired job opportunities, as per their skills and qualifications, have forced job applicants to take jobs for which they are over qualified in order to avoid unemployment.

3.2. Measures

Standard scales were used in this study and measured on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree. Access to training was measured using the 3-item scale developed by Bartlett (2001). Cronbach's α reliability for this scale is 0.757. Benefits from training were measured using the 12-item scale adopted from a study by Bulut and Culha (2010), which was originally taken from a study by Noe and Wilk (1993). Cronbach's α reliability value for this scale is 0.953. Support for training was measured using a 6-item scale modified by Bulut and Culha (2010) based on a scale adopted from Bartlett (2001) and Noe and Wilk (1993). Cronbach's α reliability value for this scale is 0.902. In order to measure organizational commitment, a scale of one of its components, i.e., 'affective commitment (AC)', was used,

since its ability to predict organizational commitment has gained a sufficient amount of attention from researchers (Meyer, Becker, & Van Dick, 2006). AC was measured using a 6-item scale developed by Meyer, Allen, and Smith (1993). Cronbach's α reliability for this scale is 0.891. Service quality was measured using a 22-item scale modified by Tsaour and Lin (2004) based on the scale by Parasuraman et al. (1988). Cronbach's α reliability value for this scale is 0.984.

3.3. Analytic approach

The analysis of the data was done using the SPSS AMOS 20. A confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was carried out in order to verify the fitness of all the scales. To assess the fitness of the proposed model, the following measures were used—goodness-of-fit index (GFI), adjusted goodness-of-fit index (AGFI), root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), and the normed fit index (NFI).

4. Results

4.1. Confirmatory factor analysis

The means, standard deviations, and correlations among the variables are presented in Table 2. The first step in analyzing the data was the analysis of the measurement model through a CFA.

Table 1
Respondents' profile.

Employees' details (n = 494)	Frequency (s)	Percentage (%)	Details of customers (n = 1080)	Frequency (s)	Percentage (%)
<i>Gender</i>			<i>Gender</i>		
Male	435	88.06	Male	703	65.09
Female	59	11.94	Female	377	34.91
<i>Age (in yrs)</i>			<i>Age (in yrs)</i>		
18–20	30	6.07	18–20	141	13.06
21–30	216	43.73	21–30	379	35.09
31–40	173	35.02	31–40	314	29.07
41–50	50	10.12	41–50	161	14.91
51–60	20	4.05	51–60	66	6.11
61 & above	5	1.01	61 & above	19	1.76
<i>Education</i>			<i>Occupation</i>		
Senior School	130	26.32	Self-employed	161	14.91
Graduation	252	51.01	Blue collar	141	13.05
Post Graduation	112	22.67	White collar	368	34.07
<i>Work Experience</i>			Manager/Executive	184	17.04
6 months & under	15	3.04	Housewife	119	11.02
6–12 months	25	5.06	Retired person	96	8.89
1–9 yrs	221	44.74	Others	11	1.02
10–19 yrs	173	35.02			
20–29 yrs	34	6.88			
30 yrs & above	26	5.26			

Table 2
Descriptive analyses.

n = 494	Mean (S.D.)	Correlation				
		1	2	3	4	5
1. Access to training	2.32 (1.14)	1.000				
2. Benefits from training	2.16 (1.14)	0.56**	1.000			
3. Support for training	2.21 (1.19)	0.45**	0.59**	1.000		
4. Organizational Commitment	1.92 (1.07)	0.58**	0.69**	0.64**	1.000	
5. Service Quality	1.77 (1.18)	0.49**	0.62**	0.55**	0.69**	1.000

Note: ** denotes significance level of 0.01.

The outcomes of the CFA revealed a good fit ($\chi^2 = 1461.226$, degrees of freedom [df] = 1117, $p = 0.000$, GFI = 0.893, AGFI = 0.882, NFI = 0.938, RMSEA = 0.025, CI [confidence interval] = 0.035–0.050). Table 3 indicates that all the measures' coefficient α s were higher than 0.70, therefore confirming that all measures are sufficiently reliable. Also, composite or construct reliabilities varied from 0.757 (access to training) to 0.984 (service quality). The factor loadings of all measures were significant ($p < 0.001$), as well as within the acceptable limits. Since the results revealed high values of construct reliabilities and significant factor loadings, the convergent validity of the model is confirmed (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988; Bagozzi & Yi, 1988). Moreover, the average variance extracted (AVE) values were recorded greater than 0.5 and composite reliabilities were recorded greater than AVE values. Hence, these results again confirmed the convergent validity model (Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2010).

In this study, the discriminant validity was also assessed. Fornell and Larcker (1981) suggested that the AVE value of every construct should be greater than the squared correlation coefficient with other constructs. Table 4 confirmed the discriminant validity. Further, the values of the maximum shared variance (MSV) and average shared variance (ASV) were combined with the AVE values. If all the ASV and MSV values are recorded less than their respective AVE values, discriminant validity prevails (Hair et al., 2010).

To check the problem of common method bias, Harman's one-factor test (Podsakoff & Organ, 1986) was conducted. This test revealed that the first factor explained a variance of 48.7%, which was less than 50%. Therefore, a common method bias was not considered a problem in this study.

Additionally, a variance inflation factors (VIF) test was carried out. According to Neter, Kutner, Nachtsheim, and Wasserman (1996), the VIF test helps in determining "the inflation of variances of the estimated regression coefficients when the independent variables are linearly related" (Pare, Tremblay, & Montréal, 2007, p. 333). In the present case, the VIF factors' values varied from 0.682 to 0.799, which can be considered the "maximum VIF value in excess of 10 is often taken as an indication that multicollinearity may be unduly influencing the least square estimates" (Pare et al., 2007, p. 344). Therefore, the findings indicate that the independent constructs have a good relationship with each other.

4.2. Structural equation model

In the present study, the hypotheses were tested using structural equation modeling. After comparing the direct effects, full mediation, and partial mediation model (see Table 5), fit indices GFI, CFI, NFI, and RMSEA of the partial mediation model reported better values. Therefore, the fit indices values of the appropriate model, i.e., partial mediation model, were $\chi^2/df = 1.308$, GFI = 0.893, CFI = 0.985, NFI = 0.938, RMSEA = 0.025.

The R -square value ($R^2 = 0.711$) showed that access to training, benefits from training, and support for training produces an adequate variance in organizational commitment and the other

value ($R^2 = 0.571$), which illustrates that commitment determines the adequate variance in service quality.

The values for path estimates are shown in Table 6. Access to training influences organizational commitment in a positive manner ($\beta = 0.31$, $p = <0.001$), supporting Hypothesis 1. Support for training influences organizational commitment in a positive manner ($\beta = 0.33$, $p = <0.001$), supporting Hypothesis 2. Benefits from training also influence organizational commitment positively ($\beta = 0.34$, $p = <0.001$), supporting Hypothesis 3. Further, organizational commitment influences service quality positively ($\beta = 0.53$, $p = <0.001$), thereby supporting Hypothesis 4.

The next step was to examine the mediation nature of organizational commitment using Baron and Kenny's (1986) method. The proposed model fulfilled all the conditions of their method (see Table 6). According to the partial mediation model (see Table 6), access to training and support for training does not significantly influence service quality, however, benefits from training do significantly influence service quality. Further, access to training and support for training significantly affects service quality through the effects of organizational commitment. Therefore, it can be stated that organizational commitment acts as a partial mediator in this study. According to the partial mediation model (see Table 5), access to training positively influences service quality through the influence of organizational commitment 0.16 (0.31×0.53), fully supporting Hypothesis 5. Support for training positively influences service quality through the influence of organizational commitment 0.18 (0.33×0.53), fully supporting Hypothesis 6. Benefits from training positively influence service quality through the influence of organizational commitment 0.18 (0.34×0.53), as well as the benefits from training that significantly influence service quality directly 0.17 (reduced β coefficient), thereby, partially supporting Hypothesis 7. The values for path estimates can also be seen in Fig. 2 and Table 7 shows the results of the proposed hypotheses.

5. Discussion and implications

To achieve a sustainable competitive advantage, it is important that a firm carries out sustainable employee development practices. Developing employees through new skill acquisition and upgradation is considered the most effective way to improve SME efficiency (Chi, Wu, & Lin, 2008; Yi-Chun & Jacobs, 2008) in the hospitality and tourism sectors, which are a key source for a nation's economic growth (Cravo, 2010; Cunningham, 2011). In this regard, researchers have suggested that effective learning and training capabilities of SMEs is the key to success (Cope, 2003). This study examined the role of perceived training related activities for improving the quality of services offered by tourist hotel employees in Uttarakhand, India.

The findings of the study suggest that the perception of employees concerning various training related activities has a strong positive impact on the commitment level of employees toward their organizations. In this sense, the impact of various perceived training related aspects on organizational commitment and the subsequent impact on the quality of services offered by tourist hotel employees provides valid proof for extending the theory that the perception of training related activities acts as a base for an effective employer–employee social exchange relationship (Balkin & Richebé, 2007). It further affirms that providing training to employees can be an effective tool for influencing their commitment level and, subsequently, their service quality, which is much more than a function of development and is a generally recognized skill upgradation (Lambert et al., 2009; Owens, 2006).

Even though it has been recognized in the hospitality industry that service quality is the key to attracting and retaining customers, few studies have been conducted in developing economies like

Table 3

Overall reliability of the constructs and factor loadings of indicators.

Construct	Indicators	AVE	MSV	ASV	Cronbach's α /CR	Factor loadings	t-value
Access to training	My organization has stated policies on the amount and type of training the employees can expect to receive.	0.51	0.51	0.39	0.757/0.757	0.69	10.027***
	I am aware of the amount and type of training that my organization is planning for me in the coming year.					0.72	10.218***
Benefits from training	This organization provides access to training.	0.63	0.57	0.46	0.953/0.953	0.73	8.222***
	Participating in training programmes will help my personal development.					0.80	11.681***
	Participating in training programmes will help me perform my job better.					0.80	11.671***
	Participating in training programmes will lead to more respect from my peers.					0.78	11.539***
	Participating in training programmes will help me network with other employees.					0.81	11.732***
	Participating in training programmes will help me stay up to date on new processes and products or procedures related to my job.					0.82	11.851***
	Participating in training programmes will increase my chances of getting a promotion.					0.78	11.528***
	Participating in training programmes will help me obtain a salary increase.					0.75	11.374***
	Participating in training programmes will result in more opportunities to pursue different career paths.					0.78	11.555***
	Participating in training programmes will give me a better idea of the career path I want to pursue.					0.79	11.628***
	Participating in training programmes will help me reach my career objectives.					0.81	11.746***
	Participating in training programmes will help me get along better with my manager.					0.81	11.757***
Support for training	Participating in training programmes will help me get along better with my peers.	0.61	0.51	0.39	0.902/0.902	0.80	11.700***
	My manager can be counted on to help me develop the skills emphasized in training programmes.					0.71	11.148***
	I can expect my manager to assign me to special projects requiring use of the skills and knowledge emphasized in training.					0.81	11.945***
	My manager enthusiastically supports my participation in training programmes.					0.75	11.511***
	My manager believes advising or training are one of his or her major job responsibilities.					0.77	11.655***
Organizational Commitment	I would not hesitate to tell my manager of a training need I have in a particular area.	0.58	0.57	0.53	0.891/0.891	0.80	11.901***
	My manager makes sure I get the training needed to remain effective in my job.					0.82	12.023***
	I am not really attached to my supervisor (R)					0.72	10.969***
	I feel proud to work with my supervisor					0.73	11.035***
	I feel a sense of respect for my supervisor					0.73	11.049***
	My supervisor means a lot to me					0.77	11.331***
Service Quality	I appreciate my supervisor	0.74	0.55	0.41	0.984/0.984	0.81	11.591***
	I feel little admiration for my supervisor (R)					0.79	11.486***
	They have the latest decoration and the modernized equipment.					0.66	10.818***
	Their uniforms and looks of the employees are clean, tidy and elegant.					0.80	11.929***
	Every item of the service is labeled clearly.					0.84	12.123***
	The uniforms and looks of the employees express a sufficient sense of professionalism.					0.84	12.229***
	Be sure to complete the service in a promised time.					0.85	12.254***
	This hotel makes efforts to pursue perfect service.					0.87	12.388***
	The services of the employees make you feel confident about this hotel.					0.86	12.340***
	They can offer the service correctly and properly.					0.89	12.531***
	The offered services tally with the advertisement.					0.90	12.560***
	The employees can solve the customers' problems well and rapidly.					0.90	12.573***
	The employees will tell the customers the related information they need without being asked					0.89	12.514***
	The employees are willing to help the customers to solve the problems initiatively.					0.86	12.339***
	The employees can answer the customers' questions immediately.					0.86	12.350***
	The service of the employees can make the customers feel comfortable and at ease.					0.85	12.287***
	The employees are adequately equipped with the professional information they need.					0.89	12.487***
	The employees have good manners and kind attitude.					0.88	12.440***
	I can trust the employees.					0.87	12.406***
	This hotel considers problems from the customers' viewpoint.					0.86	12.348***
	When the customers complain or feel dissatisfied, the receiver solves the problems patiently.					0.86	12.329***
	The employees consider the individual needs of the customers and offer them personalized service.					0.87	12.371***
	The employees pay attention to every right of the customers.					0.90	12.559***
	The employees can understand the need of the customers.					0.90	12.546***

Note: AVE represents average variance extracted; MSV represents maximum shared variance; ASV represents average shared variance; CR represents construct or composite reliability.

*** significant at the 0.001 significance level.

Table 4
Discriminant validity.

	1	2	3	4	5
1 Access to training	0.509				
2 Benefits from training	0.317**	0.628			
3 Support for training	0.201**	0.343**	0.607		
4 Organizational Commitment	0.341**	0.479**	0.412**	0.577	
5 Service Quality	0.237**	0.387**	0.307**	0.476**	0.741

Note.

The numbers in the cells of diagonal line are AVE.

The numbers in the cells of off-diagonal line are squared correlation coefficients of one factor with another factor.

** denotes significance level of 0.01.

India that highlight HRD related issues. This study attempted to redress this imbalance.

This study also contributes to the literature of the tourist hospitality industry. Specifically, it puts forward a model that examines and integrates the concept of training and service quality. Although ample studies have been conducted in the past highlighting the relation between training and commitment, as well as commitment and service quality, to the author's knowledge few studies have been done that integrate both the relations and examine the same in a single model in the tourist hospitality sector.

First, it was found that employee perception of training program accessibility offered by an organization is positively related to their commitment level. The strong co-relation between the two implies that employees of tourist hotels largely appreciate the management's efforts to make training programs accessible so they can upgrade and develop their required skills, which leads to a feeling of loyalty toward their organization. Past studies conducted by various researchers have already come up with similar findings in different occupational contexts. For example, [Brunetto et al. \(2012\)](#), [Ehrhardt et al. \(2011\)](#), and [Teck-Hong and Yong-Kean \(2012\)](#) revealed that by making training programs accessible to employees, employees felt the organizations had a desire to invest in them, thus increasing their commitment level.

However, it needs to be cautioned that training programs do not necessarily help all employees develop their required skills. On the whole, it has been observed that most training programs offered by organizations are generic in nature. Often, HR departments develop

a training calendar for the entire year and circulate it throughout all the departments stating the number of training events and places. In response, department heads generally send employees to attend the training programs who are already performing relatively well. This might be an attractive and a cost efficient strategy for selecting candidates for a training program, but may not be relevant since it mostly acts as a strategy to reward better performing employees ([Bartlett & Kang, 2004](#); [Lowenstein & Spletzer, 1999](#)). Hence, the relevancy of a training program, apart from accessibility, plays an important role in increasing the efficiency and performance of workers. Further, it is also equally important for organizations to ensure that relevant training programs are made accessible to employees so that the programs meet the needs of the organizations, along with increasing the commitment level of the employees toward their organizations.

Second, it was found that perceived support for training has a positive relationship with the commitment level of employees toward their organization, confirming the findings of a similar work carried out by various researchers in the western context ([Ahmad & Bakar, 2003](#); [Bartlett, 2001](#)). These findings suggest that when employees get expected support from an organization, their commitment level toward their organization increases. Hence, it can be concluded that support received for training plays an important role in influencing the commitment level of the employees. Based on this, it is advised that HR departments build a supportive environment that promotes employees to actively participate in training programs.

Third, it was also found that the benefits employees perceived from attending a training program has a positive relationship with their commitment level. This suggests that those employees who expect that attending training programs will be beneficial are likely to develop a higher level of commitment toward their organization. These findings are in line with the findings carried out by previous researchers who established the positive relationship between training and organizational commitment (e.g. see [Ehrhardt et al., 2011](#); [Teck-Hong & Yong-Kean, 2012](#)). These findings further suggest that when employees participate in training programs, it helps them develop their networks, abilities, and, hence, improve their performance. Further, it helps them to identify their career objectives and gives them the opportunity to pursue new career paths.

Table 5
Results for fit indices of structural models.

Model	χ^2	χ^2/df	$\Delta\chi^2$	GFI	AGFI	CFI	NFI	RMSEA
Direct Effects Model	1982.383; (df = 1121)	1.768	—	0.875	0.863	0.961	0.915	0.039
Full Mediation Model	1476.222*** (df = 1120)	1.318	506.161	0.891	0.881	0.984	0.937	0.025
Partial Mediation Model	1461.226*** (df = 1117)	1.308	14.996	0.893	0.882	0.985	0.938	0.025

Note: $\Delta\chi^2$ represents discrepancies between model and the following model.

***p-value < 0.001.

Table 6
Path estimates of structural models.

	Standardized path coefficients value		
	Direct effects model	Full mediation model	Partial mediation model
Access to training → Service Quality	0.18 (3.07**)		0.02 (0.35)
Benefits from training → Service Quality	0.35 (6.04***)		0.17 (2.98**)
Support for training → Service Quality	0.28 (5.44***)		0.10 (1.92)
Access to training → Organizational Commitment		0.30 (5.29***)	0.31 (5.21***)
Benefits from training → Organizational Commitment		0.36 (6.98***)	0.34 (6.42***)
Support for training → Organizational Commitment		0.34 (7.17***)	0.33 (6.82***)
Organizational Commitment → Service Quality		0.76 (13.03***)	0.53 (6.70***)

Note: **p-value < 0.01; ***p-value < 0.001.

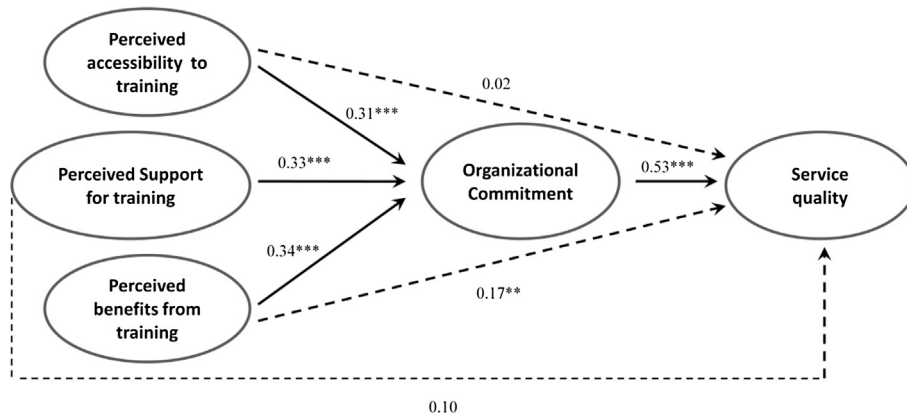


Fig. 2. Path results of structural model.

Fourth, it was found that organizational commitment has a positive relationship with the quality of service offered to customers (see Chan, Ng, & Gian, 2011; Davis-Sramek, Droge, Mentzer, & Myers, 2009). This suggests that when employees develop a higher level of commitment toward their organization, they tend to perform well by providing better quality service leading to customer satisfaction and positive word of mouth publicity.

Last, it was found that organizational commitment acts as a mediator between the various training related aspects (i.e., perceived accessibility to training, perceived support for training, and perceived benefits from training) and customer service quality. This signifies that the commitment level of employees toward their organization influences the service quality they offer when they perceive training programs are a positive step taken by management for their development.

The findings of this study validate the applicability of theories developed in western countries. Hence, based on these findings, the hospitality industry is advised to re-examine their training and development practices and draft them in such a way that they positively affect employee commitment levels, leading to an improvement of service performance. These findings also suggest that training related initiatives taken by an organization are appreciated and recognized by employees, which leads to the

development of a strong bond between the two. The presented findings point toward an opportunity and a challenge to HR departments in tourist hotels. The opportunity lies in understanding and coming up with training programs that help employees upgrade their skills and promote their individual learning and, thereby, offer better quality services to customers (see Leslie, Aring, & Brand, 1998). The challenge would be to see how SMEs re-allocate their limited funds to provide required training opportunities for their employees so that their commitment level can be enhanced leading to positive work outcomes such as providing better quality services.

Further, the findings of this study suggest that top management of the hospitality industry should focus on improving the commitment level of their employees by providing various training related opportunities. Training is a technique provided to employees that helps them reduce errors and raise productivity levels, which is necessary in today's competitive environment (Glaveli & Karassavidou, 2011; Rosli & Mahmood, 2013). Hotel managers who consider training to be a long-term investment or a useless expenditure tend not to allocate sufficient funds, while in fact it is just the opposite. Further, the outcomes of training programs should be evaluated in various ways, such as through customer surveys, peer surveys, and supervisor evaluations.

This study is the first to examine the role that training plays on influencing service quality offered in small and medium sized tourist hotels in India. Understanding the factors that lead to the success of tourist SMEs is important, since these organizations play a significant role in developing economies. As tourist SMEs have been found to play a key role in influencing the growth rate of countries like India, developing countries should be keen to understand the factors that influence their productivity and performance level.

6. Limitations and directions for future research

This study has several limitations. First, the findings of this study are survey based and cross-sectional in nature. This makes it hard to establish that the relationships unearthed between the different factors are causal in nature. Hence, it is recommended that further studies be carried out that are experimental as well as longitudinal in nature to conclusively establish the relationships unearthed in this study. Second, the cultural aspect was not given due consideration when examining the existing relationships between different factors of this study. It is important to understand that India is a collectivist nation with a different set of cultural values (Dhar, 2012; Paul, Roy, & Mukhopadhyay, 2006; Tu, Lin, & Chang, 2011) than western countries. This might have an impact on the

Table 7
Hypothesis results.

Hypothesis 1	Access to training is related positively to organizational commitment.	Supported
Hypothesis 2	Employees' perceived degree of support for training positively affects their commitment level.	Supported
Hypothesis 3	Employees' perceived degree of benefits from training positively affects their commitment level.	Supported
Hypothesis 4	Organizational commitment has a positive relationship with customer service quality.	Supported
Hypothesis 5(a)	Organizational commitment mediates the relationship between perceived accessibility to training and service quality.	Fully Supported
Hypothesis 5(b)	Organizational commitment mediates the relationship between perceived support for training and service quality.	Fully Supported
Hypothesis 5(c)	Organizational commitment mediates the relationship between perceived benefits from training and service quality.	Partially Supported

relationships unearthed in this study. Therefore, future studies need to give due consideration to this aspect. In this regard, further studies could be carried out where the different factors of an individualistic and a collectivist nation could be compared and the findings could be analyzed from a cultural perspective. Third, the tourist hotels surveyed in this study were small and medium sized hotels operating in Uttarakhand, India. Hence, the presented findings cannot be generalized to other industries. In order to generalize the findings, it is recommended that future studies should collect data from different industries, including MNCs, banks, airlines, and call centers, to make the findings applicable to them as well. Fourth, it can be seen that the majority of the respondents in this study was males (88%), which may be typical for small and medium sized hotels operating in India but which may not be the same in other work settings, such as banks or the airline industry. Hence, the findings need to be validated in a heterogeneous work setting. Last, the findings of this study were based on a survey. Hence, future studies could adopt a qualitative design to get an in-depth understanding of the factors evaluated in this study and get a clearer and more elaborate picture of the relationships shared between the various factors considered in this study.

In conclusion, this study examined the perceived effects of training on the quality of services provided by employees of tourist hotels in the Indian context. By doing so, it has advanced the literature on the mediating role of commitment between training and quality of services offered by small and medium tourist hotels. While organizations have been instinctively spending an ample amount of money on developing their employees' skills, this study has examined issues related to organizational objectives i.e., providing service excellence. It is hoped that the findings of this study will motivate organizational researchers to take up this area of research and come up with new insights that could benefit SMEs.

Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data related to this article can be found at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2014.08.001>.

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